



How To Break Bad Habits With Meditation [A 7-Week Plan]

Our life is not defined by what we think and do every once in a while. It is defined by what we think and do *repeatedly*. So developing the *right* type of habit, and breaking bad habits, should be at the heart of any effort to grow or transform your life.

In this post you will learn how to break bad habits with the help of meditation, mindfulness, and wearable devices. At the end of the post you will be able to **download a free PDF** copy of this post, together with the exercises spreadsheet for the 7-week plan.

What do you want to stop doing? Whether you want to stop binge eating, smoking, drinking alcohol, biting your nails, watching porn, wasting time online, pressing the snooze button, emotional shopping, eating fast food, gaming, swearing, complaining, scratching your skin, whatever! – these steps can help you do that.

So pick one habit you want to break – yes, one at a time! – and let's get started right now!

Meditation Helps You Change Habits

Meditation helps you break bad habits in several ways.

1. A better coping mechanism for dealing with stress

Why do we keep doing things that are bad for us? As [Leo Babauta](#) points out, bad habits usually start as a way to deal with **boredom** or **stress**.

So in overcoming a bad habit, one needs to find a healthier way to deal with that boredom or stress. For this reason, starting a new habit at the same time that you break a bad one is generally a good idea. If you don't meditate yet, considering doing that as your new habit!

Meditation and mindful breathing are healthier ways to deal with stress – and they are both free. You get the relief you are seeking without negative side effects to your health (quite the [opposite](#)).

2. More clarity of mind and motivation

Changing habits is easy **if** you are highly motivated to do so. And where does motivation come from? It comes from *clearly seeing* the negative effects of pursuing a certain habit, and the advantages of dropping it.

One of the major benefits of meditation, in the long-term, is that it increases self-awareness and clarity of mind. It gives you a deeper understanding and sensitivity in relation to the effects of your unwanted habits, which increases your motivation to change them.

3. Mindful pause before reacting

Meditation practice helps you develop the skill of quickly noticing when your mind gets distracted. By slowing down the mad spinning in your head, you can understand your thoughts and emotions more clearly.

With some months of practice, this skill translates into your daily life as increasing space between an emotional trigger and your reaction. This gives you greater freedom from your conditioned responses, which allows you to engage more wisely and effectively with the challenges of the present moment.

So, for example, if your response to stress is to automatically place a cigarette in your mouth, meditation gives you that extra space of calmness and sanity before you light it up. At that point you are then able to take a couple of deep breaths, relax the stress in your body, and put the cigarette back in the pack.

That split second of break before you go into reactive mode can be life changer. Not only does it help you avoid relapsing into a bad habit, but it can empower you to stop yourself from reacting based on anger and other destructive emotions.

4. Stronger willpower

Concentration meditation is a great willpower exercise. Every time your attention gets distracted from the breath (or whatever your meditation object is), you place it back. This is a micro-exercise of will, of mastery over your mind. In 10 minutes of sitting you will have redirected your attention to your meditation object multiple times.

With stronger willpower, you will be better able to direct your attention away from negative self-talk, destructive emotions, and poisoning thoughts. With that comes the ability to focus better on what really matters, moment after moment. This will positively affect your well-being, relationships, and career.

It will also make breaking habits much easier. With time and persistent practice, you will be able to create and drop habits out of sheer will, simply because you want to. Without tricks, gimmicks, apps, or New Year's resolutions.

"I decide, therefore I do" – I call this *freedom*. It may sound like an impossible goal to achieve. But if you keep exercising your willpower muscle on a daily basis, and honoring your own commitments to yourself, you will eventually get there.

[By the way, to read more on the topic of willpower, check out [The Willpower Instinct](#).]

5. Filling emotional gaps

Meditation practices like [Loving-Kindness](#) can help you fill many emotional gaps that would otherwise push you into bad habits.

But meditation is probably not enough for this – at least not for most people. You also need to *live life on purpose*, to have goals and values greater than your personal comfort. This will fill many needs that would otherwise seek fulfilment in habits like drinking, porn, internet addiction, etc.

Read more about finding your values and vision in life [here](#).

6. Enhanced ability to re-condition your mind

Strong concentration and visualisation abilities empower you to change the way you look at and feel about things. When breaking bad habits, visualization exercises can increase your ability to resist temptation, decreasing the pull of that habit.

As an example, here is how you could use these abilities to break the habit of eating sweets:

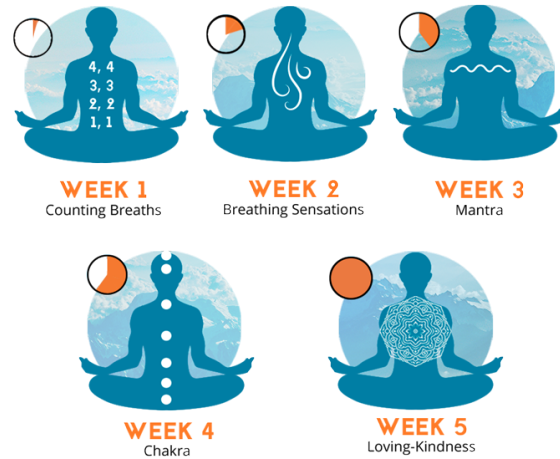
- **Exercise 1 (Temptation):** visualize that you are in front of a delicious cheesecake, or chocolate mouse (or whatever is your favorite). You are feeling bored or stressed, and the sweet is right there in front of you, inviting you to take a bite. Your mouth is watering, and the pull is really strong. Feel it in your visualization, and then see yourself having a strong determination not to eat the sweet. Hold steady to this intention until the urge passes. And then you see that you feel satisfied with yourself, happy and proud that you are stronger than that impulse.
- **Exercise 2 (Desensitization):** Visualize yourself enjoying the object of your bad habit. Make it the object of your concentration. Focus intensely on the feeling of sweetness in your mouth, as you are eating a delicious piece of chocolate. Slow down time and experience every second of it. If you do this with enough awareness and concentration, eating a bite of chocolate will feel as if you had eaten a whole bar. You will feel that it is enough; you get fed up with it.

These exercises become more effective as you increase your abilities of concentration and visualization.

Get started with meditation

As you saw in the six points above, meditation is a great help in breaking bad habits. For most people, however, it takes time for meditation to really bear its fruits. So think of it more as a foundational work, a long-term investment in yourself.

The most important thing with this habit is **consistency**. A daily meditation practice will be the basis for your progress – so it's better to keep it up no matter what. Start with as little as 5 minutes, but aim to increase up to 20 or 30 minutes. If you need help in starting the habit of meditating daily, check out [this post](#). Or consider joining my course for beginners, **Master Your Mind**.



Technology Tools for Changing Habits

In the next section I will recommend a 7-week framework for breaking bad habits. Some sources say that 21 days is often all you need to create a new habit, or break an old one. Here you will have 49 days, so it will be a smoother process.

But first let me tell you about two wearable devices I recommend for breaking unwanted habits. These wristbands will make your efforts yield quicker results. I own and use them both.

[Disclaimer: I also became an affiliate for these products, since I've used them and seen how helpful they were for me.]

MeaningToPause for developing mindfulness



This is a bracelet that vibrates every 60 or 90 minutes, to remind you to be mindful. I have personally used this for several months, as a reminder to bring my mind back to the meditative state, multiple times during my day. And I have it on me now, as I type.

You can use this as a bracelet, a necklace, or simply keep it in your pocket. It has only one

button, which is used to turn the device on or off, and to select the time of the reminders. The capsule is to be worn on the inside of the wrist, so most times it's not noticeable.

This device brings more awareness to your daily life, helping you remain mindful of your triggers, and of your intention to avoid succumbing to bad habits. This product is affordable and it is used by people in Weight Watchers, Alcoholics Anonymous, and other groups.

You can get it [here](#). Or read more about similar [tools](#).

Pavlok for aversion therapy



The deepest and most primitive layer of our brain is the **lizard brain**. Its role is very clear: to *keep you alive and avoid pain at all costs*. This part of our brain is energetic and stubborn, and it can easily overpower your rational and emotional brain. So being able to make the lizard work *with* you is a great asset.

This is precisely what makes [Pavlok](#) interesting. It is an innovative device that allows you to “communicate” directly to your lizard brain, through the language the lizard best understands: *pain*. It clearly tells your inner lizard that it is *painful* to continue with the bad habit.

How does it do that?

Pavlok associates a mild zap with your bad habit, training your brain to stop liking that temptation. It uses vibration, beep, and zap sensations that ranges from pleasant to uncomfortable. And it's tested and safe.

The accompanying mobile app also has an interesting audio course in changing bad habits.

The principle behind this product is solid, and so are the results – hundreds of people could break their bad habit in **as quick as 5 days!** So I'm highly recommending this one!

I have personally used this device and found it to be highly effective. It made it easier for me for change behavior and improve myself in several ways.

You can find more about the Pavlok [here](#).

How to break bad habits in 7 weeks

Before starting, take some time to prepare. To build up motivation and a stronger sense of purpose, go through this quick exercise:

- List 10 *negative side* effects of continuing with your bad habit
- List 10 *positive changes* in your life that would happen if you completely got rid of this habit
- List the top 10 *excuses* you normally use to rationalize engaging in this habit

It's important to take some time and actually list 10 things in each of these items, even if you need to push a bit. This will create a stronger impression in your mind as to why you really need to break your habit.

Finally, ask yourself what is the main *emotion* behind your drive to stop this habit. Make sure it is positive. Decide to break your bad habit from a position of personal strength and confidence, not from a perspective of failure, guilt or shame.

Here is the link to the worksheet: <http://bit.ly/1qOapAf>

WEEK 1 – Raising Awareness

During this first week you are not trying to change the habit at all. You are simply developing self-awareness about your triggers – internal and external.

Your task is to take note of all the cases where you fall into your bad habit:

- **What times** of the day does it actually happen?
- **Where** are you?
- **Who** are you with?
- **What triggers** the behavior and causes it to start?
- How are you **feeling** right before it?

Also notice how you feel, in your body, **during** and **after** doing the bad habit. For instance, if your habit is eating sweets, when you are about to engage in it say to yourself “*I’m about to eat some chocolate now. What am I feeling?*” Then, when eating, you say to yourself “*I’m eating sugar now. How do I feel?*” And after you are done, “*I have just eaten some sugar. How do I feel now?*”.

You will be surprised how this simple inner dialog increases self-awareness and self-honesty.

We are not trying to repress or suppress the impulse – we are simply raising awareness. And awareness by itself often cools down our reward-seeking brain, allowing us to make a more conscious choice, rather than acting automatically.

We are not digging into the psychological causes or traumatic events in your life that might have triggered this habit to start. What matters is that there is an emotional need that this habit is filling. All we're interested in here is discovering the triggers. Later they will be replaced with a more healthy behavior, one that fulfills that same need.

At the end of the week, review your notes and notice the main triggers (place, emotion, people, and times of the day). A clear recognition of these is essential for the work of the following weeks.

WEEK 2 – Environment Change

At this point, you have more awareness of the common patterns for your behavior. The next step, then, is to commit to making 3-5 changes in your environment, so that it becomes *harder* for you to do the bad habit. Diminish external triggers, and create barriers to that behavior.

For example, if your habit is smoking, and you usually do it during your lunch break, make sure that right after lunch you do another activity instead. Or bring lunch from home to work, and eat in a place where smoking is not allowed. Or you can “forget” to take your pack of cigarettes with you when you go out. Or limit the time you spend hanging out with people who smoke and trigger your behavior. Or [zap yourself](#) whenever you do it.

It's easier to remove the temptation than to resist it! So make it hard for you to perform the behavior you wish to stop.

With these little changes, the number of times that you do that habit will diminish. This will also save your willpower – a scarce resource – for more important moments.

WEEK 3 – Mindful Pauses

From this week onward, you will add a *mindful pause* every time you feel triggered to fall into your bad habit.

What does this mean? Once you feel the pull to perform that behavior, tell yourself:

No problem, I will [bad behavior]. But before that, let me just pause and breathe deeply for 2 minutes.

Then for two minutes breathe slowly and deeply. Fill your lungs when breathing in, and let all air go when breathing out. Try to make the breathing pattern long and even. And bring your attention to the sensation of the air moving through your body.

After these 2 minutes (about 10 breaths) reevaluate: “How do I feel now?”

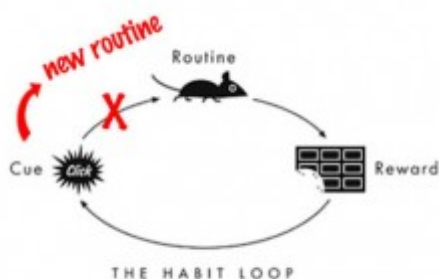
- If you still feel a strong urge to engage in the habit, then go forward with it, and experience that action as mindfully as you can.
- If you feel you don't have the same urge anymore, or that it became more manageable, then don't do it. Instead, notice how you feel different. And reward yourself! You have just practiced mindfulness AND stopped a bad habit at the same time!

Many times, that short pause is enough to allow the emotional trigger to wear off. I actually had a coaching client that stopped her habit of scratching her skin simply by following this tip.

You might want to get a [MeaningToPause](#) to help you in this step. With their hourly reminders, it will be easier for you to have the discipline and mindfulness required to take this pause.

WEEK 4 – Behavior Replacement

If the habit is still pressing at this point, then you need to choose a replacement behavior. Instead of fighting the trigger, you make use of it, and just assign a *positive behavior* to that trigger.



Here are just some examples:

- Instead of having a smoke after lunch, go for a walk

- Instead of drinking coffee when you wake up, drink green tea
- Instead of biting your nails when you wait for the green light, bring your attention to your body and take some mindful breaths
- Instead of using “ah”, “hum”, “you know” when talking, use pauses
- Instead of eating sweets in the middle of the day, chew a gum
- Instead of watching porn when you are bored at home, read a book or exercise
- Instead of pressing the snooze button, immediately jump out of bed as soon as you hear the alarm
- Instead of emotional shopping when you are down, watch a good documentary, or go out with friends

It doesn't need to be the same alternative behavior every time. You can have different behaviors for different triggers.

So the **goals** for this week is:

- Mindfully pause whenever the urge of the unwanted habit arises (Week 3), and keep the environment changes you made (Week 2).
- For the times that the pause doesn't work, replace the urge with an alternative behavior. Aim for replacing it at least half of the times. Once you have replaced the behavior, notice the difference in the way you feel after it, as compared to after doing the bad habit.

Not only are you getting rid of bad habits, but you are using their established triggers to develop good habits instead, which is great!

You can aid this process by going through the “Temptation Meditation” I mentioned in the beginning of this post. To recap, the idea of that exercise is to:

- visualize the temptation strongly, and feel it in your bones
- visualize having willpower you need, and making the decision to choose the replacement habit over the bad habit
- visualize that the urge has passed, and feel the satisfaction of having done the positive habit instead

WEEKS 5 ~ 7 – No Mercy

This is a continuation of Week 4, with the difference that your goal is replacing the bad habit 100% of the times. Also, continue with the mindful pauses, and do more environment changes if needed.

In these last three weeks, you can make use of **aversion therapy**. This means that every time you relapse you zap yourself using something like a rubber band (or a [Pavlok](#) if you want to go pro!

When everything else fails, your lizard brain comes to rescue! Aversion therapy creates an association in you that:

BAD HABIT = PAIN = DANGER

And your lizard knows very well how to work with pain and fear! It will quickly make sure you never fall into that habit again.

Conclusion

You have learned how meditation can help you change your habits by:

- giving you a better tool to cope with stress
- increasing your willpower
- giving you more mindfulness and mental clarity
- helping you fill the emotional gaps in healthier ways
- allowing you to re-condition your mind more easily

You also saw how wearable devices like [MeaningToPause](#) and [Pavlok](#) can be valuable tools for building or breaking habits.

And you learned about my 7-week framework for changing habits. If you follow these steps, and are patient with the initial resistance, your chances of success are great!

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What bad habit are you trying to break? Please leave a **comment**, and share what is the main tip you took away from this article.

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